

WHO SHALL NOT DOUBT

Drawings by W. Pryor

BY WILLIAM BROWN MELONEY



"The first to come into your life when the whole world goes out, that is a friend!"

IT was early in November, a November that began on the North Pacific like a rose-laden June and finished in storm and disaster, that Pericles O'Brien left San Francisco to save the Montana, a new China-Japan mail liner, which had been stranded across seas at the rocky entrance to Yokohama. It was on a mid-

March morning, five months afterward, that he brought her home through the Golden Gate and anchored her off Black Point.

He had done a big man's job, and done it well, performed a sea master's task worthy of the finest praise of his deep-wise tribe, and yet it was with a sense of personal failure that he turned the vessel over to her owners in the hour of arrival and went down her high black side. From the launch that carried him shoreward he looked back several times at the huge fabric of steel, where she lifted her three buff funnels and the trucks of her four pole masts against a low gray sky; but he felt no exultation, no pride. Invariably his gray eyes came to rest on the half-masted ensign that drooped from the Montana's stern.

Pericles turned away finally as the launch drew in toward Meiggs' Wharf, and his gaze went searching among the faces on the landing stage and those up on the pier for his partner in the West Coast Salvage Company. John Laysan was not there; but even as Pericles' heart chafed with this realization he spied the tall figure of William Thornton rearing itself head and shoulders over all others; and his spirits lifted instant, for

it is a pleasant thing to be met by a true friend at the gates of home.

"Welcome home, my boy!" Thornton was saying a minute later where he stood on Meiggs', his hand clasped in Pericles' and his eyes aglow with admiration of the bronzed sea giant, whom he had known since the hour of his tempestuous birth thirty years before. "You've done a big piece of work, a fine thing, saving that ship."

"Thank you, Commodore," answered Pericles, employing the title of affection that the port had long before given to this one of its few remaining pioneer ship-owners. "And how goes the world with you?"

"Very well, very well," was the Commodore's answer, and as he spoke his gaze went out to the Montana.

"And Mrs. Thornton?"

"Same brave soul you've always known."

"I've a fine shawl for her. But don't tell her. It's to be my surprise," and with that Pericles glanced away to search again for Laysan. Failing to discover him, his gaze slowly joined William Thornton's, which still rested on the Montana, and once more all that he could see on the liner was the drooping ensign at her jackstaff.

A WONDERFUL, a splendid, piece of work," the Commodore was saying when, with a tightening of the hand that rested on Pericles' shoulder, he paused sharply. "But that flag, Pericles! It's at half mast!"

"Yes—signaling my failure, Commodore," answered Pericles with a note of deep emotion in his voice.

"Failure? Your failure?"

Nodding with unmistakable sadness and for a second

meeting the Commodore's eyes, which were gray like his own, Pericles slipped an arm through his friend's and led him away shoreward.

"I saved the ship, Commodore," said he as they walked along; "but I failed in the biggest thing there was to do—I didn't bring Ed Jamison, her skipper, home. That flag out there's for him. A man can't—"

The Commodore, murmuring something that was inaudible to Pericles, faltered slightly in his step. Pericles paused.

"Go on, go on!" said Thornton, marking his pace to his friend's as they resumed their way along the waterfront. It was the Commodore's one interruption.

"A man can't put a ship ashore in any of these big lines today," continued Pericles, "and escape the penalty. When a man beaches his ship as Jamison did he beaches himself. There's no second chance, nothing to be offered in mitigation. I found Jamison out there in Yokohama standing up in a superhuman way. He would have got the ship off himself if he had been left alone. It broke his heart completely when I went aboard to relieve him. He tried very bravely to hide it from me, and before many days I realized that a bigger thing than saving the Montana would be saving him for his wife and children,—helping him to begin all over again. My father always used to say that it was never too late to begin over, and we know, you and I, that he proved it. For over four months we lived together, and God knows I put my heart and soul into the fight! This time yesterday I thought I'd won. Last night, within sight of port,—the lights of home were just lifting over the bows,—he left me on the bridge and ended it all—put a pistol to his head. 'I can't begin all over again, O'Brien,' he wrote in a note I have in my pocket now. 'I know naught but the sea. I'm forty years old, and that's too late; although you don't think so.' But Jamison was wrong—wrong!" and with an impassioned ring in his voice Pericles O'Brien halted and faced William Thornton as though in challenge.

The Commodore quickly looked out toward the bay, and after several seconds of silence and without meeting Pericles' glance he asked, "Jamison leave anything?"

"Yes, fifteen thousand in life insurance. But all the money in the world wouldn't, couldn't, fill the gap he has made in the lives of his two little boys. It's a rotten heritage! They'll be potential quitters to the end of the chapter. You know—"

HI there, Pericles! Hi!" interrupted a familiar voice, and Pericles turned to behold John Laysan shooting a big touring car across East-st., to the utter confusion of traffic and amid a storm of teamsters' and chauffeurs' billingsgate. "Think I'd let you come home without meeting you, you blamed old pirate?" he asked as he brought the machine to a stop alongside Pericles and the Commodore.

"No," answered his partner. "I knew something had happened."

"Three punctures, that's all," said Laysan with a rueful smile, only to add instant, "God, Man! I'm glad you're back again!"

It was a fine thing to see the passage of glances that went between these two men in that moment. The friendship that bound Pericles O'Brien and John Laysan was an inspiration to the best in life.

"I'll be saying good morning to you, Gentlemen," cut in the Commodore. "I have some—some important business in here," and he indicated the offices of the Red Stack Towboat Company, in front of which he and Pericles had come to a halt.

"I'll wait and give you a lift if you'll let me," offered Laysan; but the Commodore shook his head and turned to Pericles.

"My boy," said he in a voice that broke slightly, "you—you haven't failed, and—God bless you!"

With that he turned away abruptly, and holding his shoulders very straight and with his head lifted proudly walked into the Red Stack offices.

PERICLES watched him until he had disappeared from view, and then turned, to find that Laysan's gaze too had been following the Commodore.

"Poor old man!" said Laysan in a tone that made Pericles search his face for a meaning.

"Why, John—why 'poor old man'?"

It was Laysan's turn now to look at Pericles in surprise. Pericles' expression of mystification brought the realization home to Laysan that his partner had been on the other side of the world for five months.

"Didn't the Commodore tell you anything—say anything about the smash?" asked Laysan, sending the auto ahead on the high speed.

Pericles shook his head.

"He's broke—hasn't a dollar in the world—not so much as an office to hang up his hat in," and as Laysan